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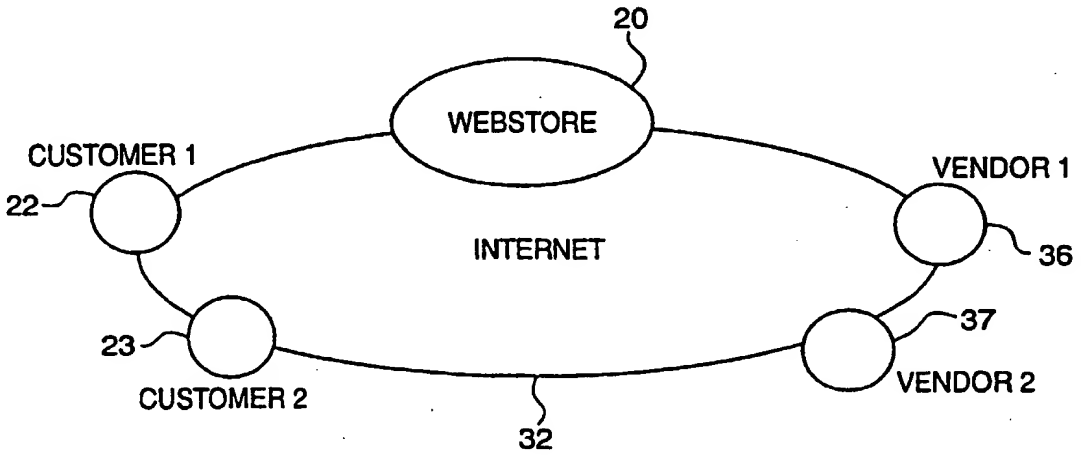

(57) Abstract

A webstore for electronic commerce provides improved features to facilitate the selection and ordering of products by customers to provide enhanced on-line shopping experience. Various combinations and bundles of products, such as gifts and greeting cards, can be ordered. The use of address books of customers provides improved reminder service, which is combined with recommendations for the associated occasions and recipients. The fulfillment of the orders is performed by the webstore operator or contracted vendors. Effective confirmation mechanism is employed to ensure delivery of ordered products.

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SYSTEM AND METHOD OF OPERATING A NETWORK-BASED STORE FOR ELECTRONIC COMMERCE

Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to electronic commerce over computer networks, and more specifically to the operation of a network-based store, such as a webstore on the Internet, for conducting electronic commerce.

Background of the Invention

With the increasing popularity and accessibility of the Internet, a new form of doing business, namely selling products or services over the Internet, is growing at an explosive pace. Many companies and entrepreneurs have set up their websites to tap the potential of this new form of doing business, which is commonly referred to as "electronic commerce." Typically, such a website, which is often called a "webstore," presents to a customer accessing it a plurality of web pages describing the products (or services) it offers. The customer can select items from the product list and enter a purchase order, which is electronically transmitted to the webstore. Subsequently, the order will be fulfilled, i.e., the ordered products will be shipped to the recipient specified in the order.

Although electronic commerce is relatively new, it has demonstrated many significant advantages over the traditional way of doing business, which is to purchase goods from conventional stores. For example, a webstore can often offer a wide selection of products that is not easily available in conventional stores. The convenience of shopping at a webstore is another major factor for the increasing popularity of electronic commerce. A customer can access a webstore from her office or home through the network connection, without having to physically take a trip to a conventional store, browse through aisles of goods to find the desired product, and go through the check-out line to purchase it. The time saved by purchasing products at webstores can be significant.

By way of example, one market that is considered especially suitable for electronic commerce is that of gifts and greeting cards. Sending gifts and greeting cards is the most common way for people to establish and reinforce social relationships, and in each year there are many occasions, events, and holidays that call for the sending of gifts and greeting cards. Shopping for gifts and greeting cards

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at conventional stores and shipping them, however, is often rather time consuming. A webstore for greeting cards and gifts, in contrast, can offer a wide variety of products for selection by customers. By going through a few web pages of the webstore and making a few mouse clicks or a few keystrokes, a customer can order gifts and cards for a recipient, and the webstore will take care of the shipping of the selected products. The viability of electronic commerce for greeting cards and gifts has been established by existing webstores, such as The Hallmark Shop website operated by Hallmark Cards, Inc.

The successful implementation of a webstore requires careful integration of many aspects of business operation. For instance, the user interface features for presenting available goods and taking orders require the utilization of attractive visual designs and should be informative, easy to understand, and natural to use. Beyond the basic functions of describing the offered goods and taking orders on-line, some webstores also offer other features to make on-line shopping at their sites a more enjoyable experience. For instance, some webstores allow a customer to set up an address book of recipients to assist the customers in managing their purchase decisions. On the logistic side, the operator of the webstore has to ensure that the orders received are properly and timely fulfilled, and that the customers who placed the order be informed of the fulfillment status of their orders.

Regardless of how a webstore is designed to operate and which types of goods or services it offers, it will be appreciated that there are many aspects that have to be well considered. Every element of the webstore operation may affect the overall look and feel of the webstore and affect the shopping experience of the customers. With the number of webstores increasing rapidly and many webstores competing in similar lines of goods, the proper integration of features that enhance the shopping experience helps to distinguish one webstore from the others and in the long run can determine the success of the webstore.

Summary of the Invention

In view of the foregoing, the invention provides a system and method of operating a network-based store, such as a webstore on the Internet or similar networks, which communicates with customers through a network for product selection and ordering. The network-based store of the invention provides improved user

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interface features to facilitate the viewing, selecting, and ordering of products by customers, thereby providing an enhanced on-line shopping experience. Various combinations and bundles of products, such as gifts and greeting cards, can be selected and ordered. The use of address books of customers provides improved reminder services, which is combined with recommendations for the associated occasions and recipients. The fulfillment of the orders is performed by the webstore operator or contracted vendors. Effective confirmation mechanism is employed to ensure delivery of ordered products.

The advantages of the invention will become apparent with reference to the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the drawings in which:

Brief Description of the Drawings

FIGURE 1 is a schematic diagram of an electronic commerce system in which a webstore of an embodiment of the invention operates on the Internet;

FIG. 2 is a user interface screen showing a representation of a shopping basket for temporarily storing items selected by a customer;

FIG. 3 is a user interface screen showing an address book of the customer maintained by the webstore;

FIG. 4 is a schematic diagram showing a combination of a gift and a greeting card;

FIG. 5 is a schematic representation of an interface screen showing a gift basket containing multiple items;

FIG. 6 is a schematic diagram showing placement of personalized images and text on a greeting card;

FIG. 7 is a schematic diagram showing the operation of a self-publishing service provided by the webstore;

FIG. 8 is a user interface screen showing a reminder service data page;

FIG. 9 is a schematic representation of a reminder message containing recommendations of products;

FIG. 10 is a schematic diagram showing the collection of retail sales data for analysis by the webstore;

FIG. 11 is a schematic diagram showing operation of an editorial help service provided by the webstore;

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FIG. 12 is a user interface screen showing a calendar view of holidays and reminders of occasions for gift purchase;

FIG. 13 is a schematic diagram showing an arrangement for one customer to modify the address book of a second customer for sending reminders;

FIG. 14 is a schematic diagram showing an arrangement for a vendor to fulfill orders received by the webstore;

FIG. 15 is a schematic diagram showing an arrangement for generating a delivery confirmation for an electronic greeting; and

FIG. 16 is a schematic representation of a user interface screen showing original and discounted prices of a product offered by the webstore.

While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative constructions, certain illustrated embodiments hereof have been shown in the drawings and will be described below. It should be understood, however, that there is no intention to limit the invention to the specific forms disclosed, but, on the contrary, the invention is to cover all modifications, alternative constructions and equivalents falling within the spirit and scope of the invention.

Detailed Description of the Embodiments

In the following description, the invention will be described by referring to an embodiment in which a webstore on the Internet is implemented for vending goods, such as greeting cards and gifts. It will be appreciated, however, that the invention is not limited to the context of selling greeting cards or gifts and can be advantageously used by network-based stores offering other types of goods and services. Moreover, the invention may be used to practice electronic commerce on networks other than the Internet.

Turning now to the drawings, FIG. 1 shows the general environment in which the webstore of an embodiment operates. The webstore 20, as a node on the Internet 32, can be accessed by customers 22, 23 through network connections of the Internet. A customer typically has a computer that has a suitable web browser installed thereon, and may have a printer connected to the computer for printing images and text downloaded from the webstore. Other forms of terminals for accessing the Internet, such as televisions with WebTV™ service or hand-held devices, may also be used by a customer for viewing the contents of the webstore. The webstore may

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optionally have one or more vendors 36, 37 connected thereto for order fulfillment as will be described in greater detail below.

Once a customer is connected to the webstore, a plurality of interface pages, typically written in the Hypertext Markup Language("HTML"), may be viewed by the customer using a web browser or the like. The interface pages include text and graphic representations and links for various products offered by the webstore that can be selected by customer for ordering. In one embodiment, the customer is presented with a "shopping basket," which is a temporary data object for storing information about items selected by the customer for potential ordering while the customer browses through the various interface pages. Analogous to using a conventional shopping basket, the customer can put items interesting to her into the shopping basket or take them out of the basket. FIG. 2 illustrates an interface page showing the contents of a shopping basket 40. As illustrated in FIG. 2, the shopping basket contains three products 44, 45, and 46 selected by a customer. After the customer has finished shopping, she can click a "CHECKOUT" button 48 to get a summary of the items in the shopping basket and enter a purchase order for them.

In accordance with a feature of an embodiment, the customer can select multiple items for different recipients, and require the items be shipped on different dates. For instance, as shown in FIG. 2, a "Thanks a Bunch" flower bouquet 44 is to be shipped to a recipient named Mary on April 20, 1999, and a "Birthday Party" flower bouquet 46 is selected for "Cindy" and to be delivered on June 20, 1999. The items selected may be from different vendors. In this way, a customer can finish shopping for a plurality of recipients in a single shopping session at the webstore, and for each recipient multiple items from different vendors can be selected for different occasions with different delivery dates. If the customer has ordered products from different vendors for the same recipient and for the same occasion, the fulfillment of the orders by the vendors can be coordinated so that the ordered products are delivered at or about the same time. For instance, all the ordered products can be first sent to one fulfillment coordinator, who then puts the products in one package and ships it to the recipient.

In accordance with another feature of the embodiment, the webstore allows the customer to set up an address book to store information regarding potential recipients,

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i.e., people to whom the customer may want to send gifts or cards. By way of example, FIG. 3 shows the address book 50 of a customer. The address book stores information about the recipients, including, for example, their nicknames 52, addresses 54, and e-mail addresses 56, etc. The recipient information stored in the address book can be used in many ways to simplify the shopping process and reduce the amount of manual input of data by the customer. For instance, a list of recipients of greeting cards for a specific holiday can be generated directly from the address book of the customer.

To simplify the creation of the address book, the customer can submit a pre-compiled list of addresses, and the webstore will create an address book for the customer. This feature is especially useful for companies that already have a computerized address list of customers to whom the companies wish to send periodic greetings. The recipient data in the address identifies holidays and occasions for sending a greeting to each recipient in the address book. For instance, all customers listed in the address book may receive a holiday greeting, while only certain customers receive a birthday greeting.

Returning to FIG. 2, when the customer shopping at the webstore puts a selected item into the shopping basket 40, the webstore prompts the customer to enter the name of the intended recipient of that item. The customer is not required to enter the address of the recipient at that point. When the customer checks out, the webstore matches the recipient names given for the items in the shopping basket 40 with those names in the address book of the customer. If a match is found, the address for the recipient as provided in the address book will be used as the shipping address of the selected item. If no match is found, the customer is prompted to enter the address and other information of that recipient. The entered address is then stored in the address book and used for shipping the selected item.

In one embodiment, the customer can combine a gift with a greeting card, which will be shipped together to the recipient. As illustrated in FIG. 4, the customer can select to have the greeting card 60 placed either outside or inside the package 62 containing the gift. The gift package may be gift-wrapped as selected by the customer. The combination of the gift and the card may be done either by the operator of the webstore or by a vendor contracted by the webstore to fulfill the orders. In the

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latter case, the vendor provides the gift product and combines it with the greeting card. The greeting card 60 may be a stock card with personalized messages printed thereon. Alternatively, the entire card, including its graphics and text, may be printed on demand by the vendor just prior to fulfillment. Shipping the gift and the greeting card together ensures that they will be delivered to the recipient at the same time.

Besides combining gifts with greeting cards, an embodiment of the webstore also lets the customer to create a "gift basket" 64 that includes a plurality of products 66, as illustrated in FIG. 5. During the order fulfillment phase, the items in the gift basket are put together in a common container by the webstore operator or a contracted vendor and shipped to the recipient. The customer may select a number of items, such as five (5), to make up a gift basket. Alternatively, pre-combined gift baskets may be offered by the webstore. The pricing of the gift basket may be determined in a variety of ways. For instance, the price of the gift basket may be the sum of all individual prices of the items in the basket, with or without an overall discount factor. Alternatively, the webstore may offer the customer a selection of a given number of items from a pre-compiled list of products to form a basket at a preset price.

When a customer orders a greeting card, the webstore of an embodiment allows the customer to personalize the card by providing personalized text and personalized images. If the greeting card is to be sent in electronic form, the customer may also include multimedia data, such as video or audio clips, with the greeting card. A personalized image may be, for example, a digitized photograph provided by the customer or any other graphic design. The personalized image may be entered, for example, from a digital camera, via scanning of a print, or as a digital file. There are different ways to include the personalized text and images in the card. For example, FIG. 6 shows a greeting card 68 with a graphic design 70 and text 72 supplied by the webstore 20, and a customer-provided, or personalized, image 74 and text 76. The personalized image 74 may be placed at a pre-defined location on the card, and the personalized text 76 then may be placed to wrap around the image. Alternatively, the personalized image 74 may be placed at any location on the card selected by the customer 22. The personalized text 76 is then placed around the image.

As an alternative to personalizing a greeting card on-line, the customer may

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purchase at the webstore a pre-printed card, which is mailed to the customer. Using a common home computer 81 with a printer 85, the customer can personalize the card by printing personalized text and/or images, such as a photograph, on the card. Alternatively, a customer in a retail store can access the webstore with the computer of the retail store, create personalized cards on-line, and print the cards on the printer of the retail store.

To enhance the "personalized" feel of a greeting card, the webstore of an embodiment allows a customer 22 to submit a digitized image of her signature. The digitized signature may be stored in, for example, the address book of the customer. When the customer orders a greeting card, the digitized signature 78 can be retrieved from the address book and placed on the card as part of the personalized design. The application of personalized writing can be expanded to include the handwriting of the customer. To that end, the customer may submit a handwriting sample 82 to the webstore. The handwriting sample is analyzed by a handwriting analysis engine 84 using techniques known to the art. The result of the analysis can then be used to generate text images imitating the customer's handwriting. Imitation handwriting of the customer generated this way can be used, for example, for the personalized text 76 on the greeting card 68 and/or for the "handwritten" address 80 on the envelope 82 for the card.

Besides offering products, such as gifts and greeting cards, to the customers, the webstore 20 of the embodiment can also offer services. For instance, referring to FIG. 7, the webstore provides a "self-publishing" service 90. A customer can transmit to the webstore a document 86 containing a story or types of information, such as a family history. The webstore operator would then provide illustration, if appropriate, print out and bind the document into a finished "book" 88, and send it to selected recipients. Alternatively, instead of shipping finished books, the webstore can send a digital version 92 of the book to the customer for printing by the customer or for review by the customer prior to the final version.

As an incentive for customers to shop at the webstore, the webstore may offer various "loyalty programs." For example, in one such program, the customer builds up "points" for varying amounts of purchases. The points could then be redeemed for products and/or services.

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As another feature to encourage customers to make purchase decisions, the webstore of an embodiment may offer products with promotional prices or other price discounts. To inform the customer of any price discount she may receive, the system preferably shows the original price and the discounted price of a selected item throughout the shopping session. For instance, FIG. 16 shows an interface screen 160 containing the description of products 162 on promotion with respective promotional prices. The original price 164 and the promotional price 166 of each product are juxtaposed such that the customer can easily see the potential saving on that product. The saving on each product and the total saving on all of the listed products can also be displayed, as illustrated in FIG. 16.

In accordance with a feature of an embodiment, the webstore 20 provides a reminder service that sends electronic messages to remind a customer of upcoming holidays or other occasions, such as birthdays of relatives and friends, that call for the sending of gifts and/or greeting cards. Information about the special occasions for which reminders are to be sent may be stored with data records for the associated recipients in the address book of the customer. For instance, the record of John Doe in the address book in FIG. 3 includes a "reminder" icon 94, indicating that a reminder is logged for this recipient. Clicking the mouse button on this icon causes a reminder service data page 95 to be presented, as illustrated in FIG. 8. The Event data 96 in this reminder page indicates that the reminder relates to the Christmas holiday. Other ways to store and present the reminder events can be used. In one embodiment, the entering of addresses, events, and reminders may be through an interface with a personal digital assistant ("PDA") device, such as a Palm Pilot™.

The reminder message may be presented to the customer when the customer visits the webstore or be sent to the customer as an e-mail. Alternatively, the reminder message may be sent to the computer of the customer as an icon before the time set for giving the reminder. When the time for reminder comes, the icon will open automatically to present the reminder message to the customer.

A customer is allowed to place an order in advance of delivery by a long period of time, such as one year. Based on the specified delivery date, the webstore determines when the order will be processed and when the product will be shipped to arrive on or around the preset delivery date. In one embodiment, if there is a long

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period between the order date and delivery date, the webstore sends a reminder to the customer prior to the scheduled shipping date to confirm that the order will be fulfilled. The reminder also serves the purpose of confirming that the recipient address has not changed since the time of ordering. If the address of the recipient has changed, the reminder message allows the customer to enter the new recipient address, which is transmitted to the webstore for updating the order and the address book.

In connection with the reminder service, the embodiment allows the customer to select and order a product for the reminded occasion quickly in response to the reminder. Rather than simply sending an e-mail at a specified time prior to the event, the webstore of an embodiment sends a reminder message with one or more product recommendations for this event. As illustrated in FIG. 9, the reminder message 98 includes a reminder portion 100 describing the upcoming event and a recommendation portion 102 that describes one or more recommended products. As shown in FIG. 9, the recommended products 104 in the reminder message are presented with selection buttons 106 or the like. The customer viewing the reminder message can click on the selection button of a product of interest to select it. When the customer clicks on the "Send Order" button 107, an order for the selected item is transmitted to the webstore. The recipient for that order is the recipient associated with the reminder message. Thus, with only a few mouse clicks or keystrokes, the customer can accomplish the ordering of a gift or other things for a recipient without having to spend the time to go through the regular shopping process.

The recommendations presented to the customer either at the webstore or in a reminder message are preferably based on the specific occasion of the upcoming event and information about the recipient. With the continued use of the webstore by the customer, the system has the ability to search for and recommend products to the customer. The system learns about the purchase behavior of the customer, such as whom the customer makes purchases for, what products the customer typically buys for particular types of recipients and/or particular occasions, etc. The system then makes product recommendations based, in part, on such information. A customer can also be prompted to fill out a questionnaire about specific recipients, such as their preferences. The system would then search for suitable products that have been

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purchased for similar recipients by other customers of the webstore. In addition, the system may alert the customer if the same gift was given to the recipient or a member of the recipient's family or other related group on a previous occasion in order to avoid duplicate gifts.

The data on which product recommendations are based are not limited to information about a particular customer or recipient but may include market survey information from various sources. To that end, the webstore 20 of an embodiment makes use of point-of-sales data from selected retail stores, such as the Gold Crown stores of Hallmark, to adjust the products offered and/or recommended on-line. As illustrated in FIG. 10, the retail sales data 108 collected from the retail stores 110 are analyzed by the Webstore. Based on the result of the analysis, products may be added to or deleted from the list of recommended products 112. The recommended products may also be ranked based on their popularity, and their recommendation ranking presented in the webstore may be dynamically adjusted to reflect the point-of-sales data.

To facilitate the management of the reminder events by the customer, the webstore of an embodiment also provides a "calendar view" that organizes all of the reminders for a customer and significant holidays in a calendar format. FIG. 12 shows such a calendar page 120, with various holidays and reminder icons 121 identified therein. The calendar view feature is preferably tailored for the particular country, culture, and/or religion of the customer and/or recipients.

In addition to product selection help, the webstore of one embodiment provides other types of customer assistance to enhance the on-line shopping experience. For instance, referring to FIG. 11, an "Editorial Help" function 114 is available for assisting the customer in crafting personalized text for inclusion in a greeting card 116. The Editorial Help function provides suggestions and examples of text personalized to the relationship with the recipient and to the occasion for sending the card. By way of example, the customer may indicate that the greeting card is a get-well card to the customer's friend, and the Editorial Help function based on that and other information can suggest various personalized messages 118 that may be put in the card.

To provide further flexibility in calendar event management, the webstore of an embodiment of the invention allows one customer to send reminders to another

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customer. As illustrated in FIG. 13, the calendar reminder system permits one customer 22 to access and update the address book 122 of another customer 23 and set up reminders therein. In this way, the second customer will receive reminders 124 set up by the first customer. The access of one customer to the address book of a second customer, of course, should be pre-authorized by the second customer. For instance, the members of a family can have shared address books so that, for example, one family member can remind the others of an upcoming event, such as the wedding anniversary of the parents. As another example, the employees of a company may access a common company address book to inform other employees of upcoming events.

In accordance with another feature of the embodiment, a "home page" may be generated for each customer. To generate her own home page, a customer answers specific questions presented by the webstore, and a home page is generated based on the answers received. The home page contains user interfaces designed to enable the customer to manage her gift and greeting card obligations. The screen content of the home page may be customized based on information about the customer or her recipients. For example, if the customer is a teenager, then her home page would have some screen contents that are sent to all teenager customers. The home page may also include preferences or desired gifts specified by the owner of the home page so that other people accessing the home page can learn what gifts the owner would like to receive.

To monitor and analyze its operation, the webstore keeps a database for storing a history of events occurred on the webstore. The history database 126 (FIG. 10) is useful for a variety of analyses. For example, the sales data enables a comparison of year-to-year and/or day-to-day sales. Website traffic information, such as the products reviewed by a customer, how much time the customer spent on a certain product page, the products ultimately bought by the customer, etc., can be analyzed.

As described above, the fulfillment of the orders placed by customers can be performed either by the webstore operator or by selected vendors. FIG. 14 shows an overview of an embodiment in which a vendor is used to fulfill orders. To permit the vendor 36 to fulfill orders directly, digital transfer of order data 128 and other types of

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information is made via network connections between the vendor and the webstore. To that end, the vendor first joins a fulfillment agreement with the webstore, under which the vendor is provided access to data relating to order fulfillment. The access to the data is preferably password-protected, and the data transmission encrypted, to ensure the authenticity and integrity of the transmitted data. After receiving the order data 128, the vendor fulfills an order by shipping the ordered product on the specified delivery date to the recipient. Some orders may require that the ordered product 132 be shipped with a greeting card 134, which may be personalized by data provided by the customer. The greeting card can be printed "on demand," i.e., printed by the vendor after receiving the order data. To that end, as shown in FIG. 14, the vendor has a system including a computer 139 and a printer 140. To print a card on demand, the card data 136, including graphic designs and personalizing information, is transmitted to the vendor for printing by the vendor's printer 140. In another embodiment, the card data may be included with the order data.

To guarantee the delivery of an ordered product, a confirmation is preferably generated after the ordered product is delivered. In the order fulfillment arrangement in FIG. 14, after fulfilling the order, the vendor 36 sends a fulfillment confirmation message 138 to the webstore so that the webstore can update the order status data in its database. The customer can then check the webstore to determine the status of the order. In another embodiment, the webstore or the vendor would send an e-mail to the customer indicating that the order has been shipped to the recipient and/or received by the recipient. In another embodiment, the recipient would receive an e-mail shortly after delivery date requesting confirmation of receiving the ordered product. The e-mail also asks the recipient 144 whether she wishes to return a thank-you e-mail or a physical thank-you card. If the recipient selected to send a thank-you note in either format, an order for the thank you e-mail or card is transmitted to the webstore and fulfilled by the webstore operator or a contracted vendor.

In another scenario shown in FIG. 15, the ordered product is an electronic greeting 142. The recipient 144 is informed that she has an electronic greeting that can be viewed at a specific URL 146, which is typically a temporary coded website. When the recipient accesses that specific URL to view the electronic greeting, an e-mail 150 confirming the delivery is automatically sent to the webstore 20 or another

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designated website. Because the URL 146 for viewing the electronic greeting is supposedly a secret revealed only to the recipient, the receipt of the confirmation e-mail 150 indicates that the recipient has viewed the electronic greeting. While viewing the electronic greeting, the recipient 144 is also prompted to determine whether she wishes to return a thank-you e-mail or a physical thank-you card. If the recipient selected to send a thank-you note in either format, an order 148 for the thank-you e-mail or card is transmitted to the webstore and fulfilled by the webstore operator or a contracted vendor.

In view of the foregoing detailed description, it can be appreciated that the present invention provides an improved system and method for operating a network-based store, such as a webstore or the like, for electronic commerce. The invention provides improved flexibility in product selection and utilizes advanced reminder service that combines product recommendations with reminder messages to assist customers in making purchase decisions. These and other features and services provided by the store offer the customers an enhanced on-line shopping experience. The use of vendors with on-demand card printing capability ensures proper fulfillment of orders received by the store.

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What is claimed:

1. A network-based store for electronic commerce wherein a customer, using a terminal device, communicates with said network-based store via a communication network, said network-based store comprising:

product selection means for providing said customer with data indicative of a plurality of products available to purchase via said network-based store;

customer order processing means for enabling said customer to select multiple products for different recipients; and

customer interface means for enabling said customer to initiate the delivery of multiple products to a plurality of said different recipients.

2. The network-based store for electronic commerce of claim 1 wherein said customer order processing means comprises:

order scheduling means for providing said customer with a data entry capability to select different delivery dates for ones of said multiple products for at least one of said plurality of said recipients.

3. The network-based store for electronic commerce of claim 2 wherein said customer order processing means further comprises:

vendor coordination means, responsive to said customer ordering products from different vendors for the same recipient, for coordinating said orders so that the ordered products are delivered to said same recipient at or about the same time.

4. The network-based store of claim 1 wherein said customer order processing means comprises:

multiple product order means for enabling selection of a single selected product for each of a plurality of recipients.

5. The network-based store of claim 4 wherein said customer order processing means further comprises:

product scheduling means for enabling said customer to select delivery dates

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for said single selected product for each of said plurality of recipients.

6. The network-based store of claim 4 further comprising:

mailing list means for managing a plurality of recipient data records stored in a database for said customer in at least one mailing list representative of a subset of said plurality of recipient data records for said customer.

7. The network-based store of claim 6 further comprising:

data transfer means for importing a plurality of recipient data records for said customer into said database from an external source of data records.

8. The network-based store of claim 6 wherein said customer interface means further comprises:

mailing list ordering means for linking recipient data records stored in at least one of said mailing lists to identify recipients for said single selected product.

9. The network-based store of claim 1 wherein said customer interface means comprises:

recipient identification means, responsive to said customer selecting a product, for prompting said customer to enter the name of the intended recipient of that product;

address linking means for matching said name of the intended recipient to those names in an address book of said customer;

means, responsive to a match by said address linking means, for using an address for said recipient as provided in said address book of said customer as the shipping address for said selected product.

10. The network-based store of claim 9 wherein said customer interface means further comprises:

address request means, responsive to absence of a match by said address linking means, for prompting said customer to enter the address of said recipient.

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11. The network-based store of claim 10 wherein said customer interface means further comprises:

address book update means for storing said entered address of said recipient in said customer address book.

12. A method of operating a network-based store for electronic commerce wherein a customer, using a terminal device, communicates with said network-based store via a communication network, said method of operating a network-based store comprising the steps of:

providing said customer with data indicative of a plurality of products available to purchase via said network-based store;

enabling said customer to select multiple products for different recipients; and

initiating by said customer the delivery of multiple products to a plurality of said different recipients.

13. The method of operating a network-based store for electronic commerce of claim 12 wherein said step of enabling comprises:

providing said customer with a data entry capability to select different delivery dates for ones of said multiple products for at least one of said plurality of said recipients.

14. The method of operating a network-based store for electronic commerce of claim 13 wherein said step of enabling further comprises:

coordinating, in response to said customer ordering products from different vendors for the same recipient, said orders so that the ordered products are delivered to said same recipient at or about the same time.

15. The method of operating a network-based store of claim 12 wherein said step of enabling comprises:

enabling selection of a single selected product for each of a plurality of recipients.

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16. The method of operating a network-based store of claim 15 wherein said step of enabling further comprises:

enabling said customer to select delivery dates for said single selected product for each of said plurality of recipients.

17. The method of operating a network-based store of claim 15 further comprising the step of:

managing a plurality of recipient data records stored in a database for said customer in at least one mailing list representative of a subset of said plurality of recipient data records for said customer.

18. The method of operating a network-based store of claim 17 further comprising the step of:

importing a plurality of recipient data records for said customer into said database from an external source of data records.

19. The method of operating a network-based store of claim 17 wherein said step of enabling further comprises:

linking recipient data records stored in at least one of said mailing lists to identify recipients for said single selected product.

20. The method of operating a network-based store of claim 12 wherein said step of enabling comprises:

prompting, in response to said customer selecting a product, said customer to enter the name of the intended recipient of that product;

matching said name of the intended recipient to those names in an address book of said customer;

using, in response to a match by said address linking means, an address for said recipient as provided in said address book of said customer as the shipping address for said selected product.

21. The method of operating a network-based store of claim 20 wherein

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step of enabling further comprises:

prompting, in response to absence of a match by said address linking means, said customer to enter the address of said recipient.

22. The method of operating a network-based store of claim 21 wherein said step of enabling further comprises:

storing said entered address of said recipient in said customer address book.

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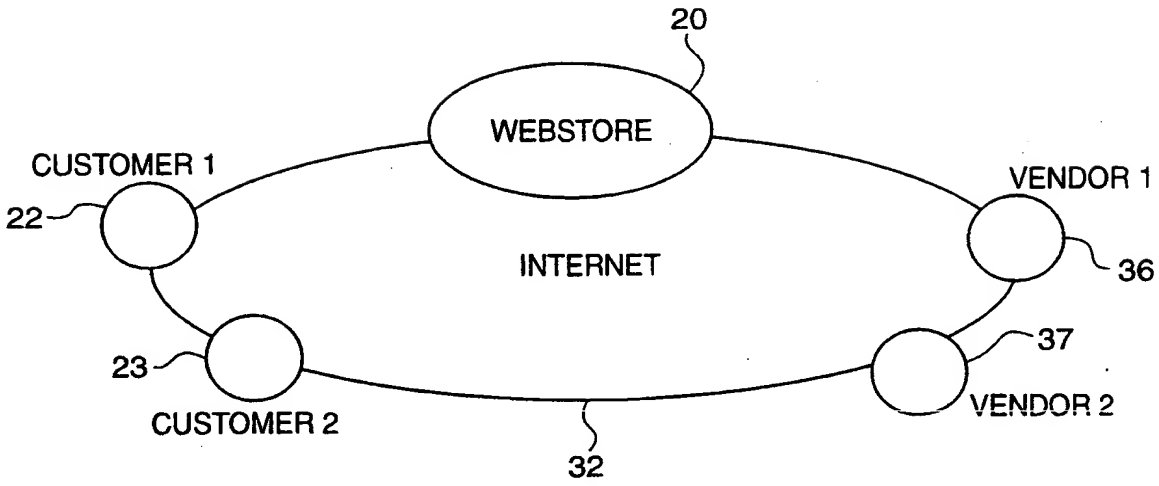
FIG. 1



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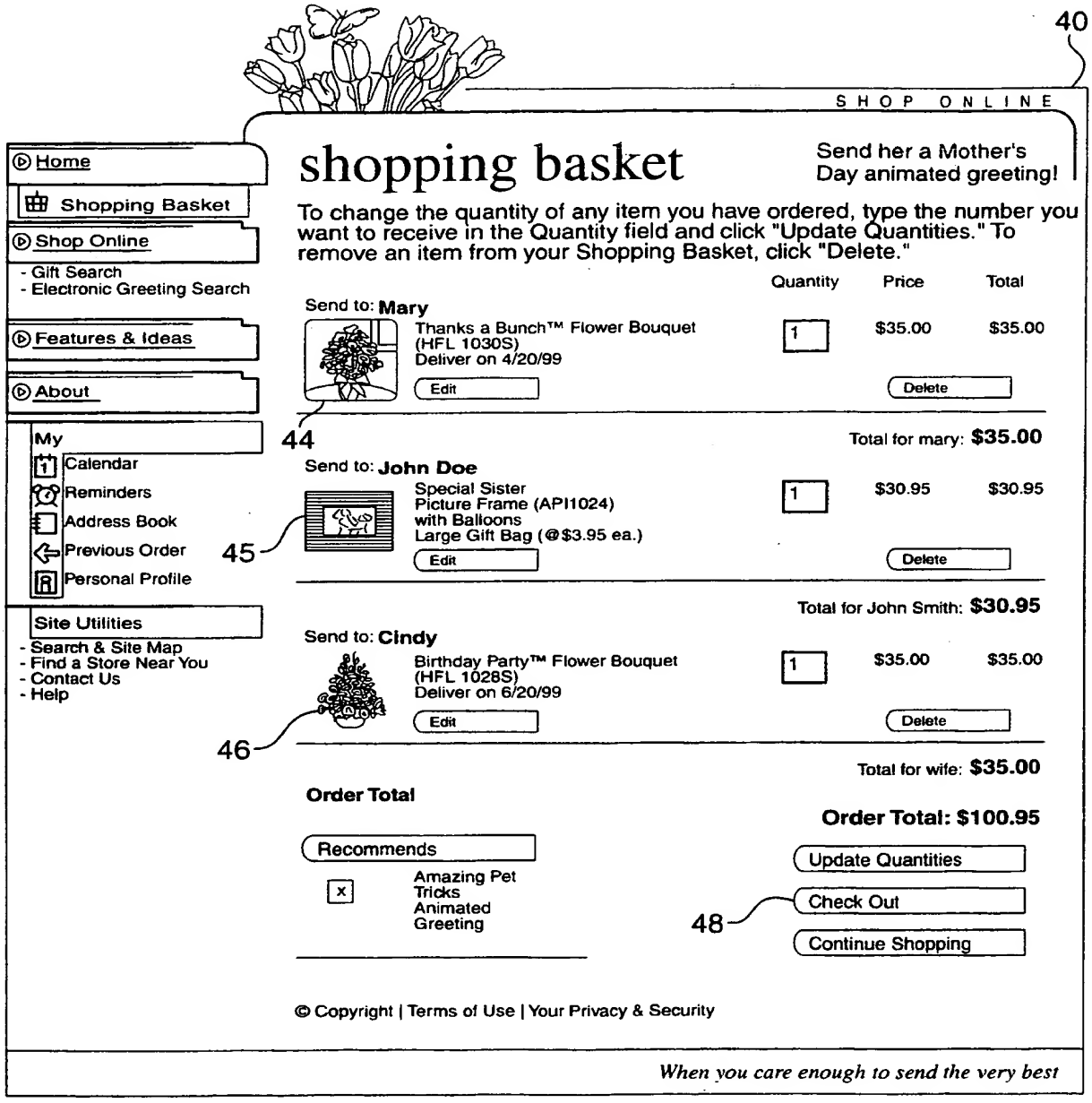
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Shopping Basket
Shop Online
- Gift Search
- Electronic Greeting Search
Features & Ideas
About
My
Calendar
Reminders
Address Book
Previous Order
Personal Profile
Site Utilities
- Search & Site Map
- Find a Store Near You
- Contact Us
- Help
shopping basket
Send her a Mother's Day animated greeting!
To change the quantity of any item you have ordered, type the number you want to receive in the Quantity field and click "Update Quantities." To remove an item from your Shopping Basket, click "Delete."
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© Copyright | Terms of Use | Your Privacy & Security
When you care enough to send the very best

FIG. 2

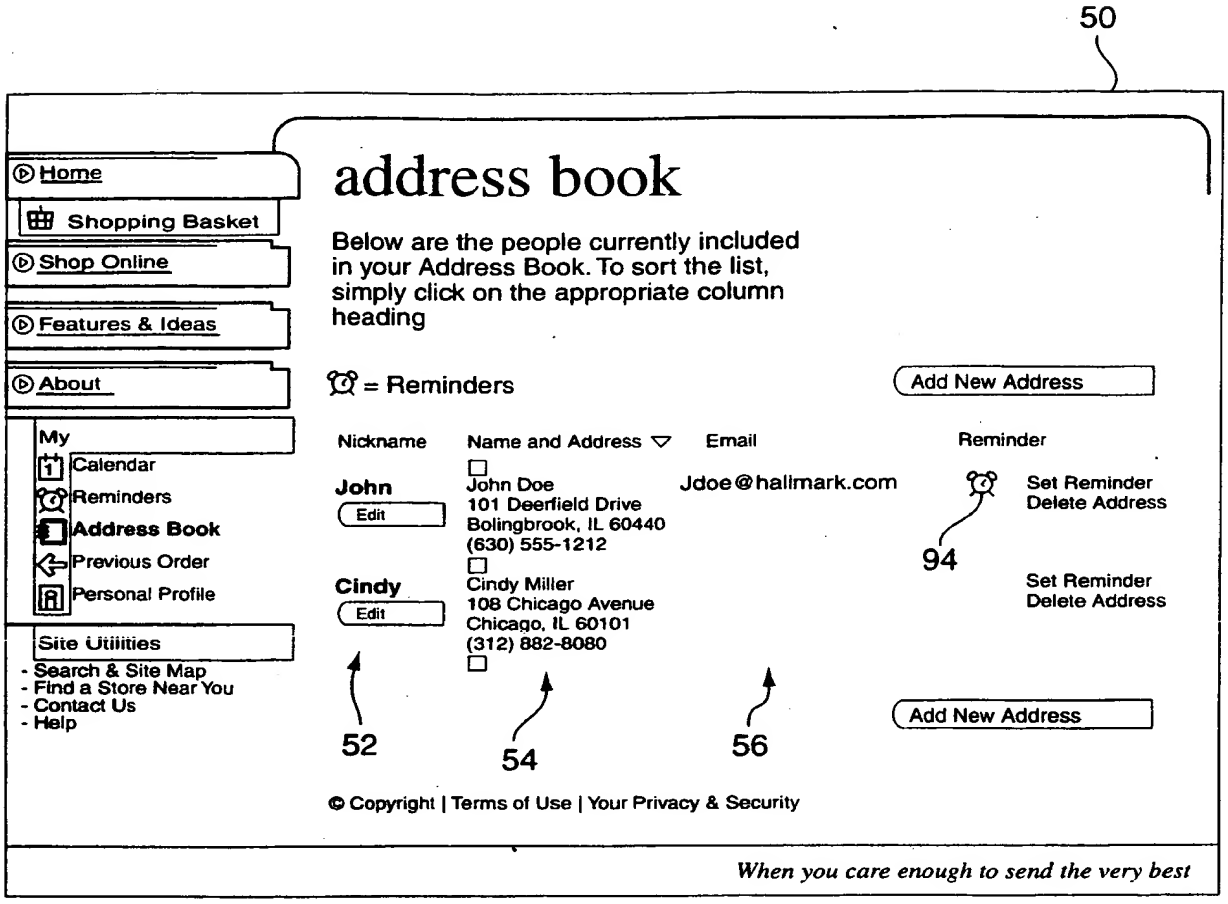

FIG. 3

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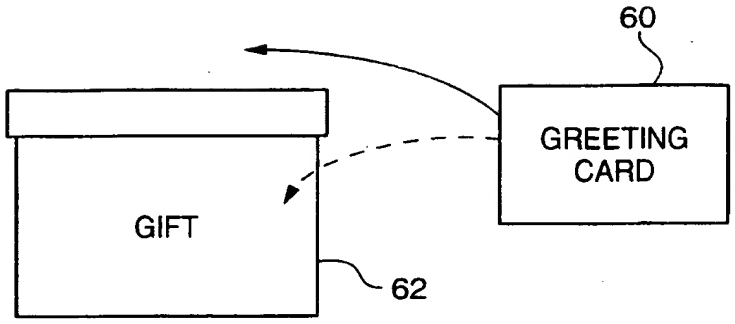
FIG. 4



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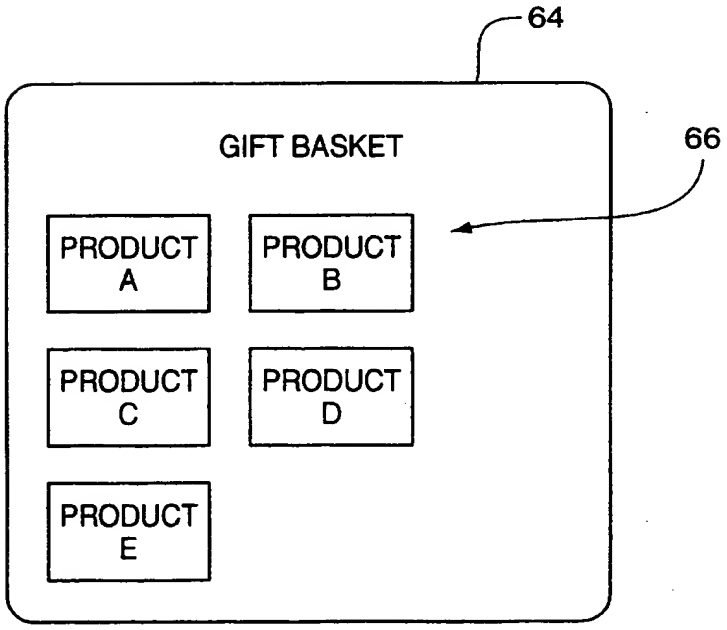

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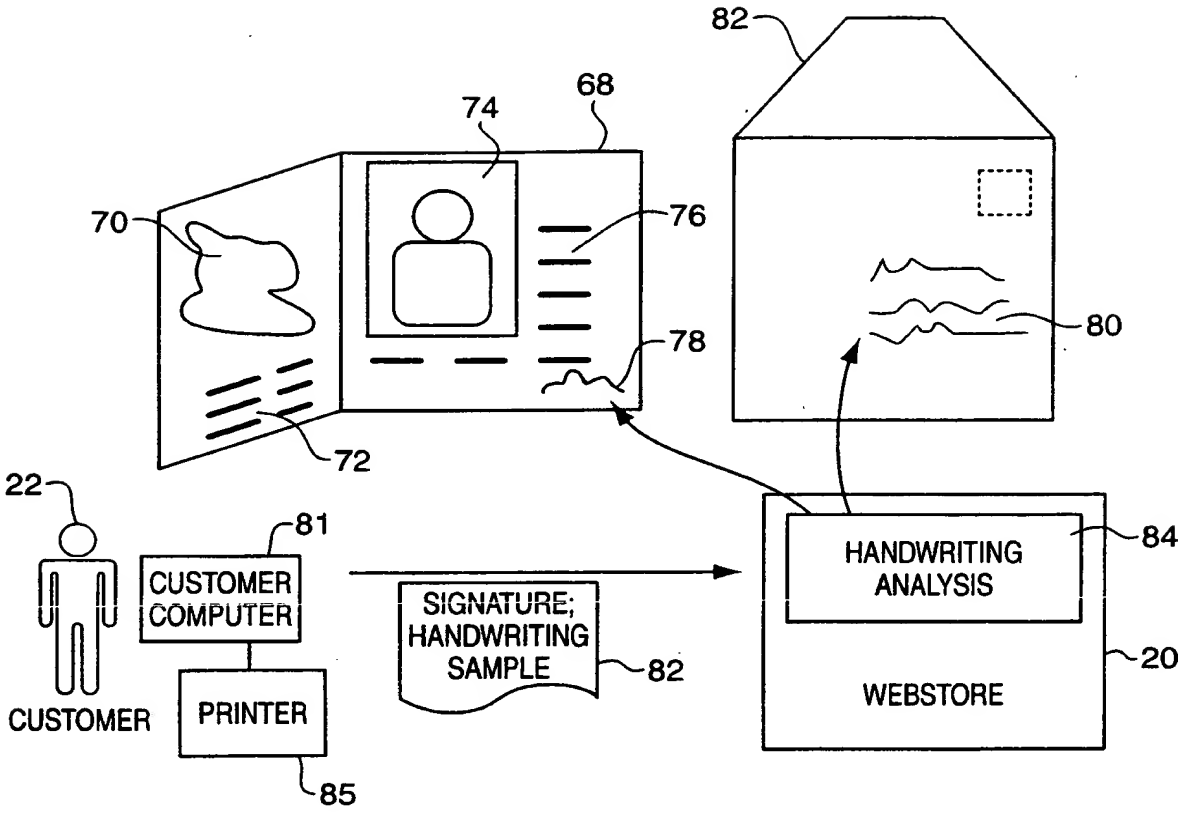

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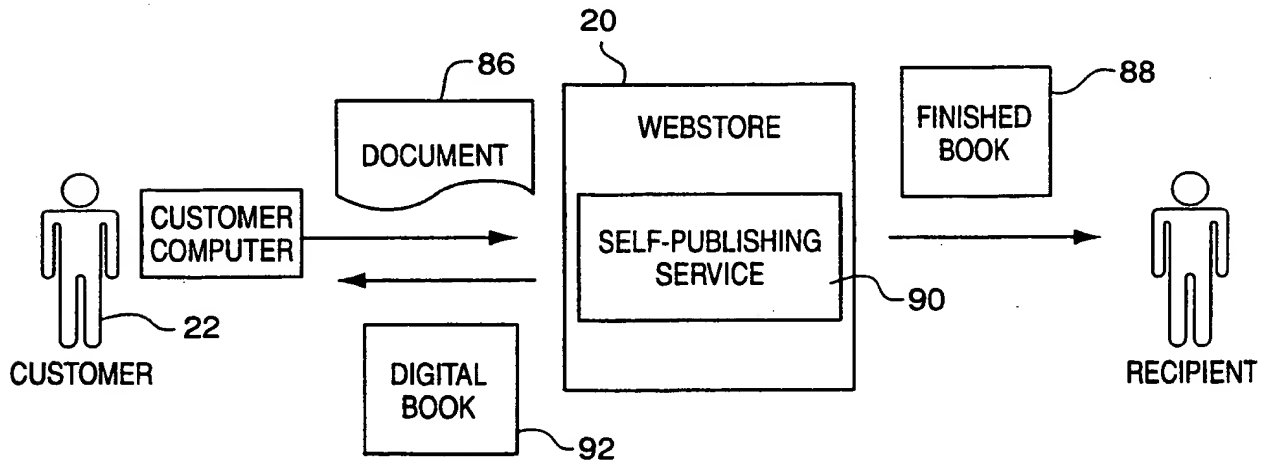

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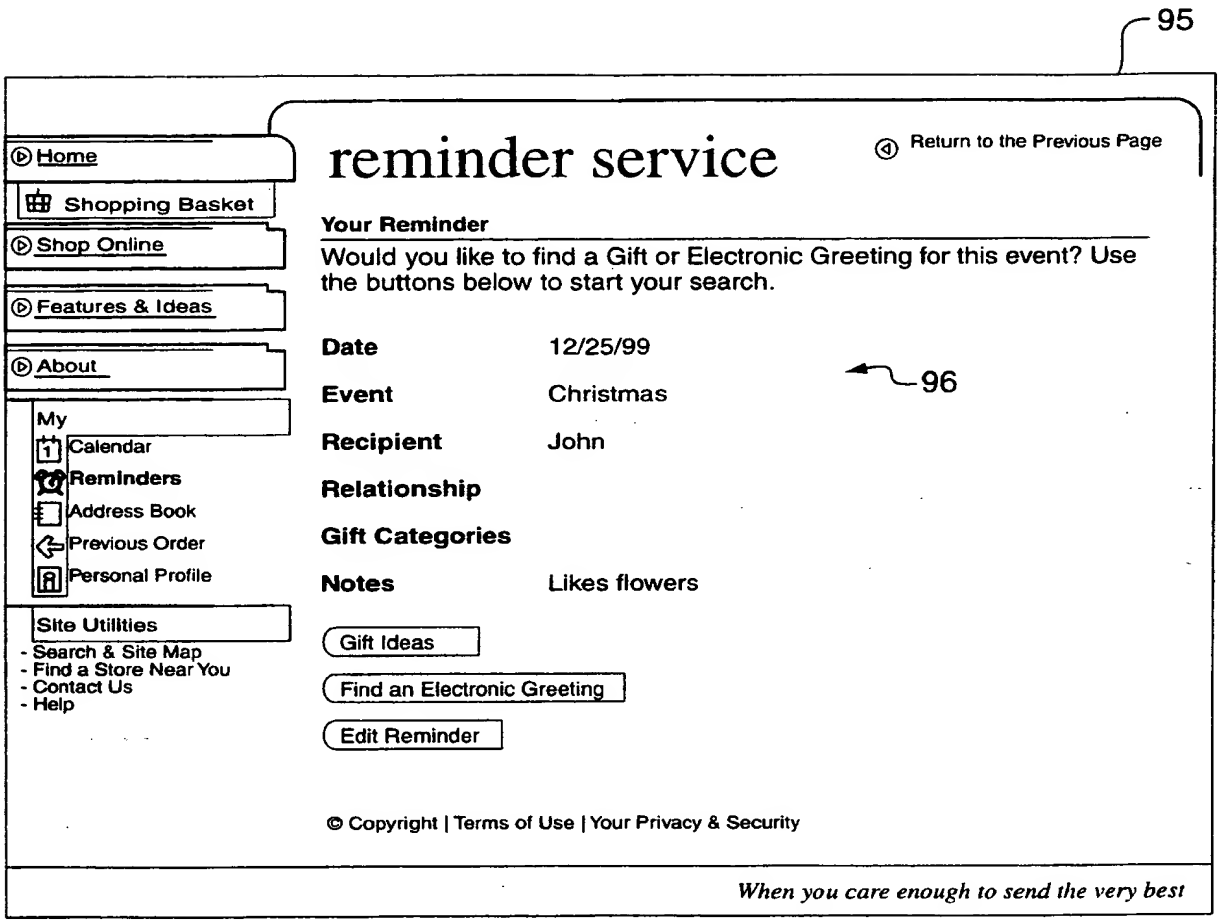
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Home
Shopping Basket
Shop Online
Features & Ideas
About
My
Calendar
Reminders
Address Book
Previous Order
Personal Profile
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- Search & Site Map
- Find a Store Near You
- Contact Us
- Help
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Return to the Previous Page
Your Reminder
Would you like to find a Gift or Electronic Greeting for this event? Use the buttons below to start your search.
Date 12/25/99
Event Christmas
96
Recipient John
Relationship
Gift Categories
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© Copyright | Terms of Use | Your Privacy & Security
When you care enough to send the very best

FIG. 8

FIG. 9

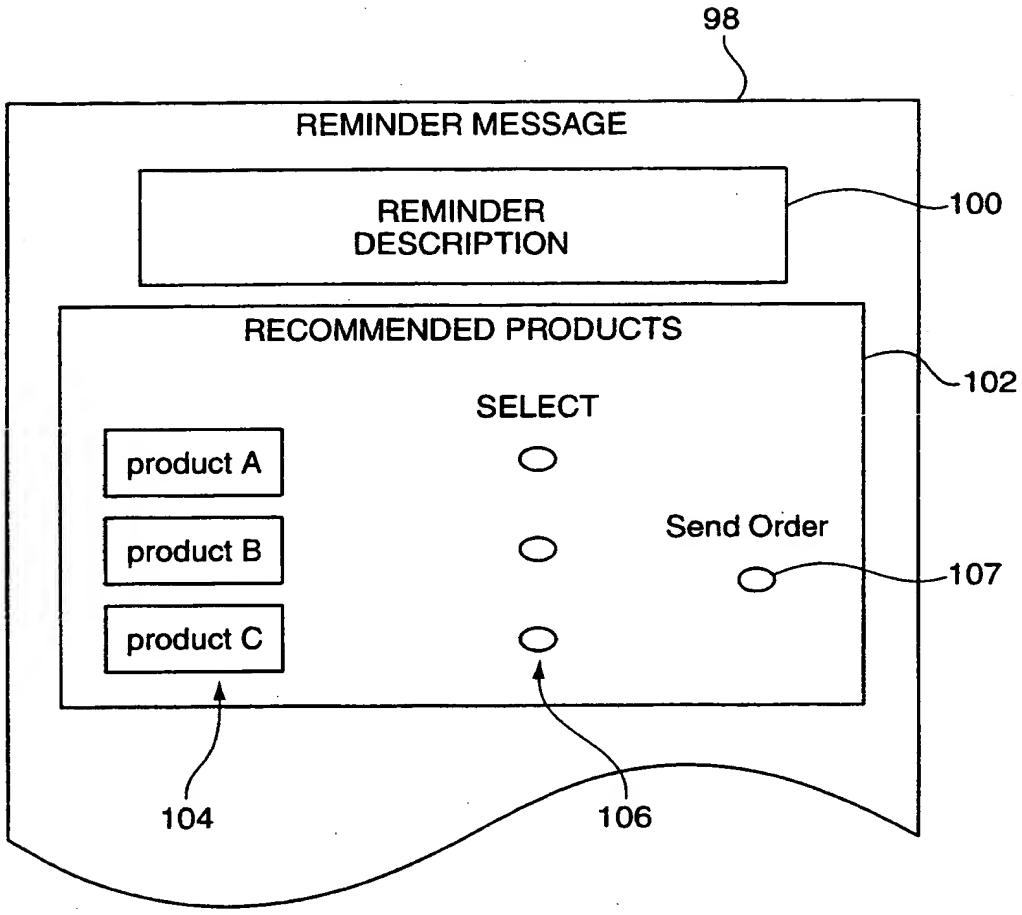

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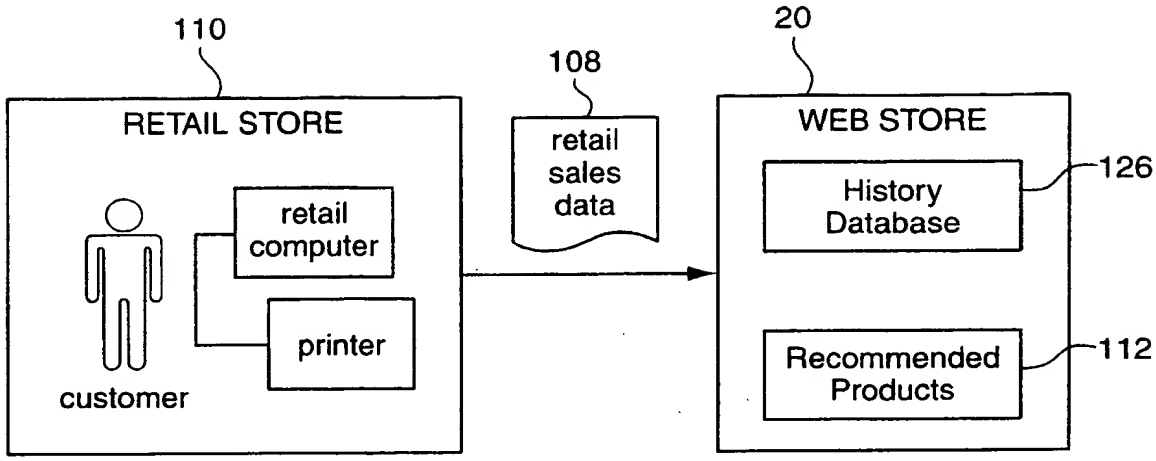
FIG. 10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WEB STORE
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Recommended Products
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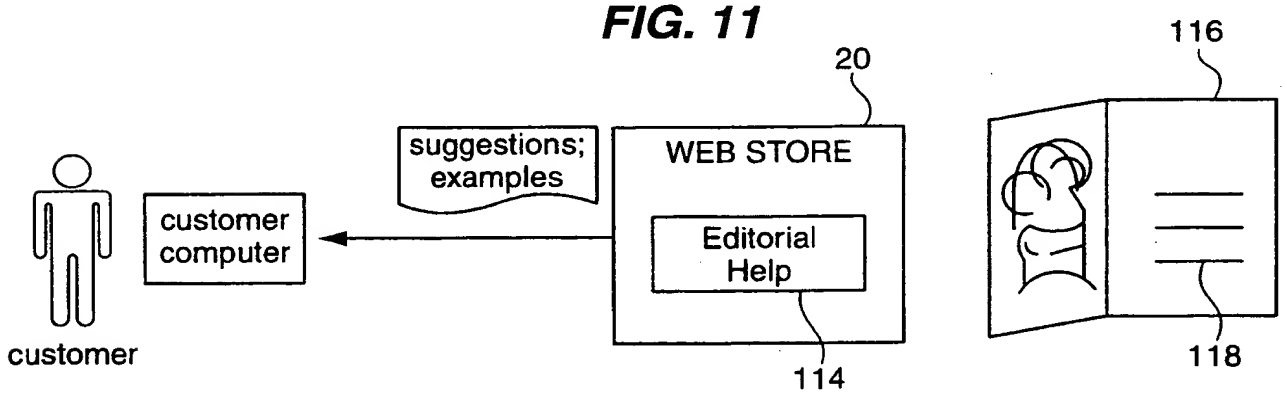
FIG. 11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WEB STORE
Editorial Help
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116
118

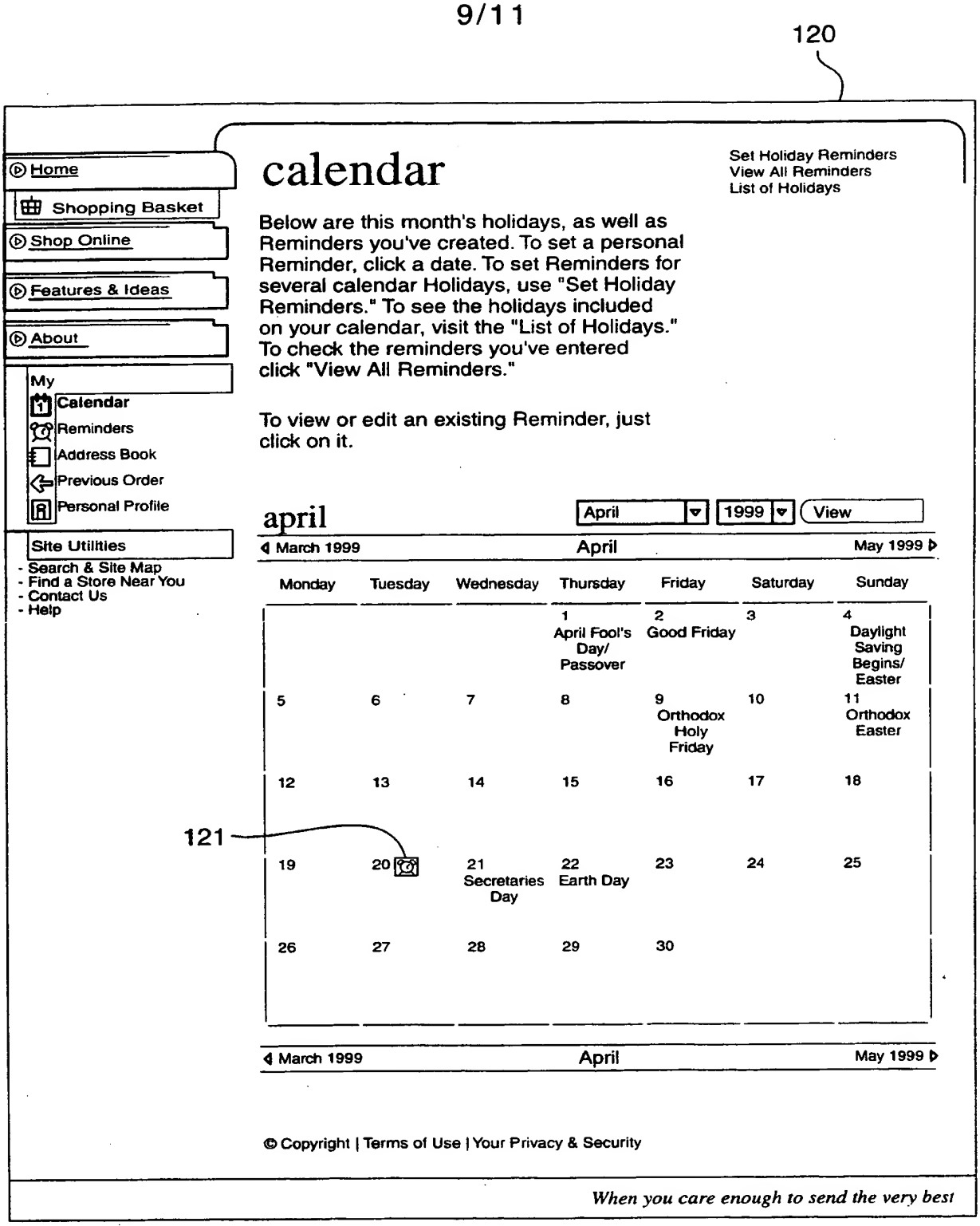

FIG. 12

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FIG. 13

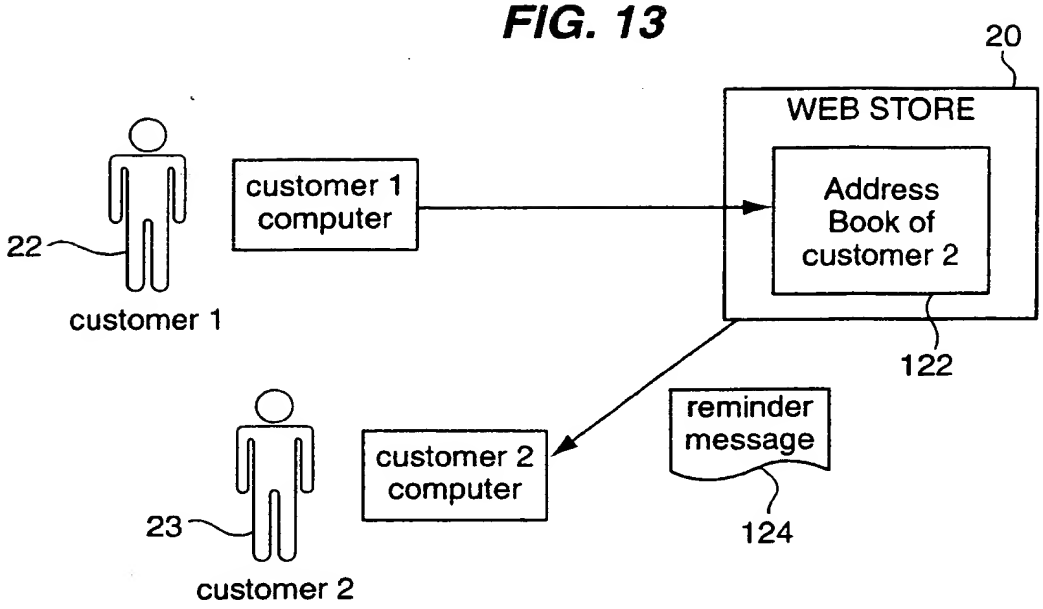

FIG. 14

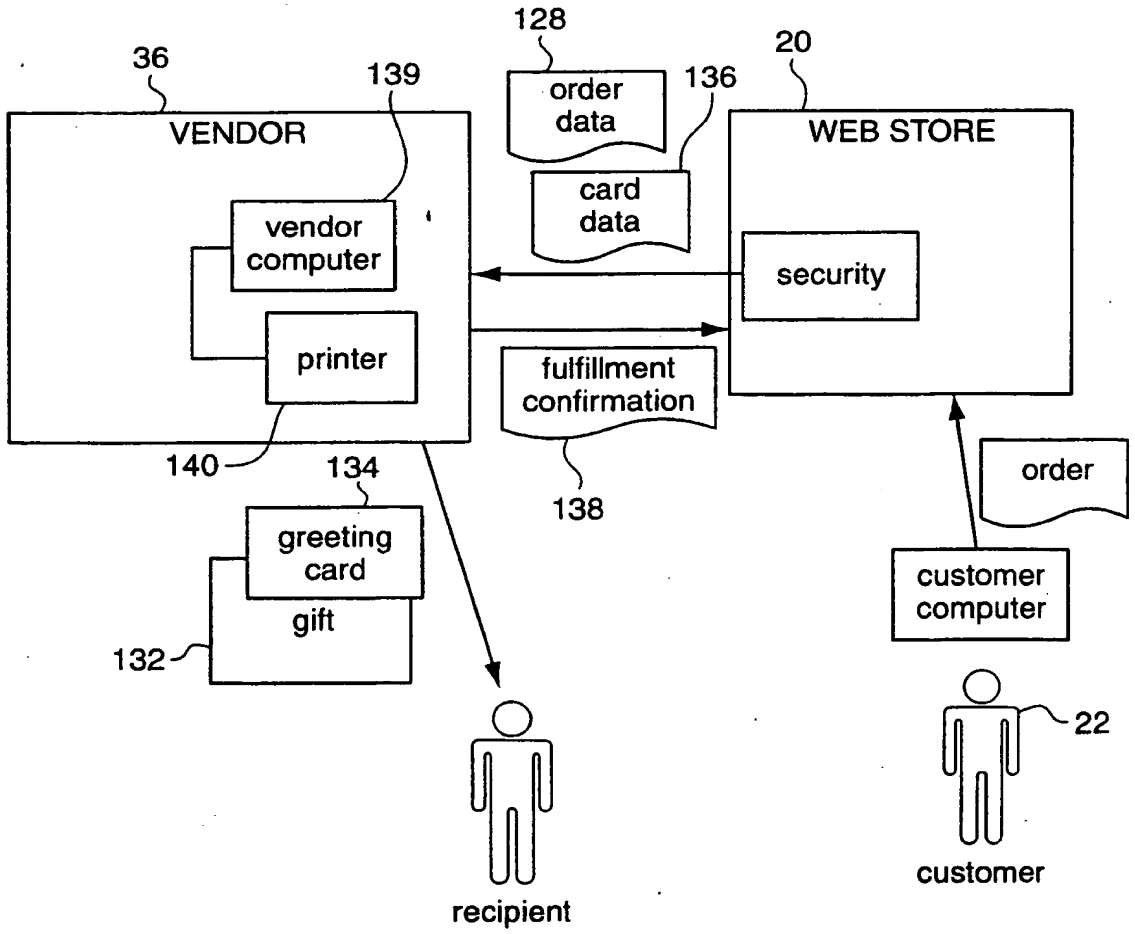

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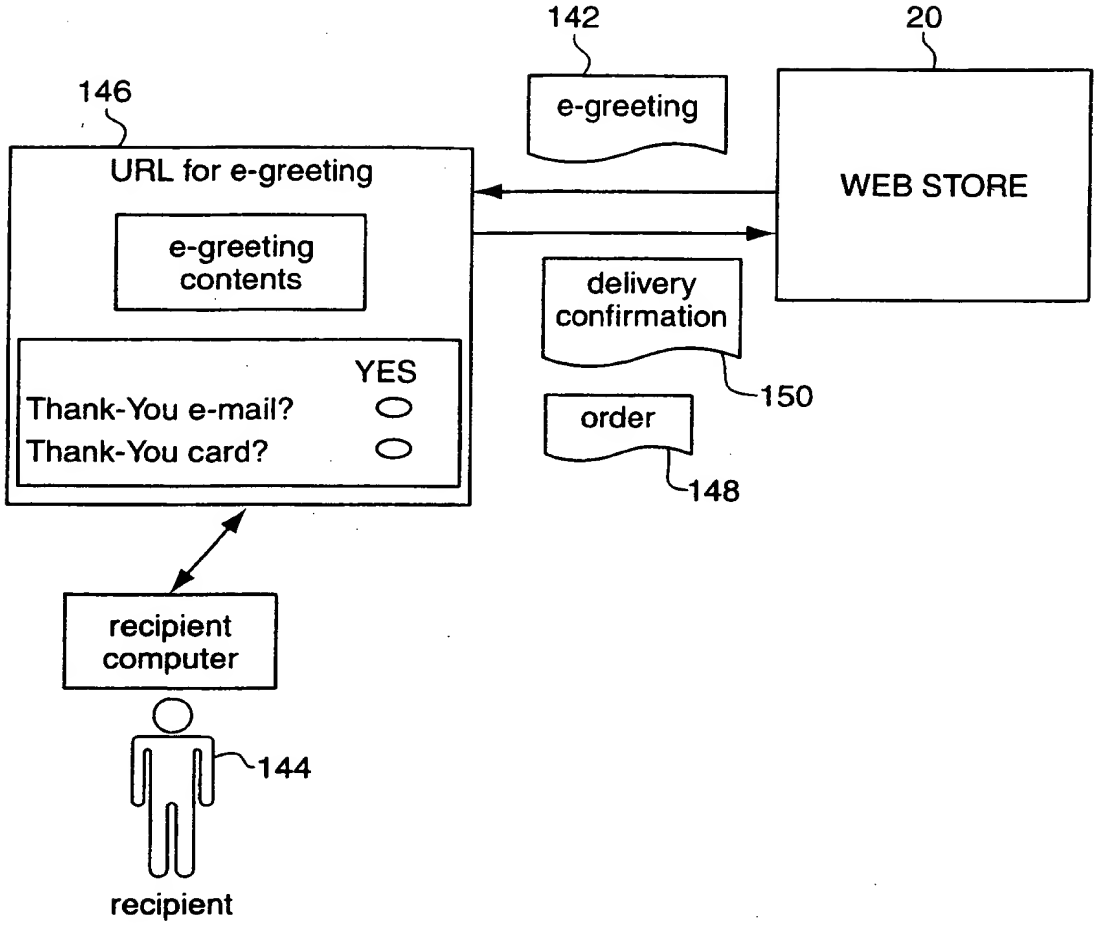
FIG. 15



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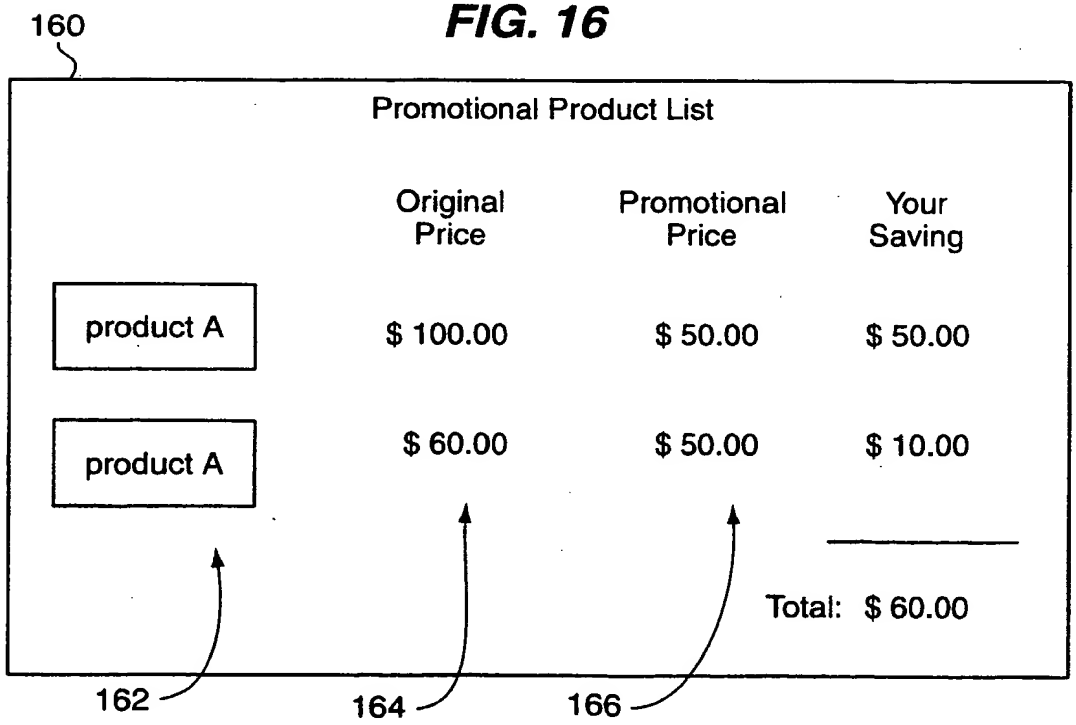

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